# GUIDELINES FOR MIXED MARRIAGE CELEBRATION AND PREPARATION BETWEEN EPISCOPALIANS, LUTHERANS, AND ROMAN CATHOLICS IN CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

Since 1984 the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic bishops have hosted an annual day of conversation for the clergy. In 1986 the bishops chose to direct the conversation to the growing pastoral concern of inter-marriage between members of their households of faith. In late 1986, the bishops appointed a group to discuss and prepare a draft of "Guidelines for Mixed Marriage Celebration and Preparation between Episcopalians, Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Central Pennsylvania." This was distributed and discussed at the February 25, 1987, Episcopal-Lutheran-Roman Catholic Conversation on Marriage Preparation Guidelines.

Following the conversation, the text was further refined to fully reflect the various traditions and to provide pastoral guidance for both the clergy and the people with regard to mixed marriage celebration and preparation.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics differ in the understanding of the sacramentality of marriage. Nonetheless, we all affirm that:

1. marriage is instituted and ordained by God.
2 according to Scripture marriage is a sign and symbol of the covenant between God and His people.
3. Christian marriage reflects the mystical union of Christ and His Church.
4. those who enter into Christian marriage model this unique relationship through a life of service and faithful love.

It was to reaffirm this basis that the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on the Theology of Marriage, established by Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, at its first meeting recorded agreement on three fundamental principles. While no such bilateral agreements exist between Roman Catholics and Lutherans or Anglicans and Lutherans, we believe that these principles so well underlie the premise of this present document that we put them forward in the hope that they will serve to set the tone for all our future mutual cooperation and sharing.

*"i . . . Holy Baptism itself confers Christian status and is the indestructible bond of union between all Christians and Christ, and so of Christians with one another. This baptismal unity remains firm despite all ecclesiastical division.*

*ii . . . in Christian marriage the man and woman themselves make the covenant whereby they enter into marriage as instituted and ordained by God; this new unity, the unity of marriage, is sacramental in virtue of their Christian baptism and is the work of God in Christ.*

*iii . . . this marriage once made possesses a unity given by God to respect which is a primary duty: this duty creates secondary obligations for the Church in both its pastoral and its legislative capacity. One is the obligation to discourage marriages in which the unity would be so strained or so lacking in vitality as to be both a source of danger to the parties themselves and to be a disfigured sign of or defective witness to the unity of Christ with His Church. Another is the obligation to concert its pastoral care and legislative provisions to support the unity of marriage once it's made and to ensure as best it can that these provisions be not even unwittingly divisive."*

*("Final Report: Commission on the Theology of Marriage and its application to mixed marriages"; CALLED TO FULL UNITY; United States Catholic Conference p. 103; 1986)*

# PASTORAL PROCEDURES

The following are presented as guidelines to assist clergy in the preparation of couples for intermarriage in which the pastors of both churches are asked to particpate. (For the purposes of this document, "Pastors" are those entrusted by their respective churches with the preparation and celebration of marriages.) In the application of these guidelines we presume that all parties involved are active in their respective faith traditions and will follow the established norms of their respective churches. We also recognize that each marriage has its own special set of circumstances that require the special judgment of the clergy and parties involved.

## A. Initial Procedures

1. The church in which the wedding is to be celebrated may be determined by the couple.
2. The pastor of the church where the marriage will take place should assume the primary responsibility for the marriage arrangements:
   a. Leadership in planning of the liturgical celebration.
   b. Insuring that the couple complies with the requirements of civil law.
   c. Pre-marital counseling.
3. As soon as the pastor is contacted by the couple regarding the marriage, contact should be made with the pastor of the other church so that the two pastors may discuss how the

responsibilities mentioned above may be met. It is important that preparations and arrangements be carried out in a spirit of cooperation from the first contact.

4. At least one joint counseling session should be planned so that both pastors could be present with the couple. Such sessions witness to the mutual respect and support from both churches and allow for an opportunity for discussions of the differences and similarities in the teachings of the churches as regards marriage.
5. Pre-marital counseling should be provided by the pastors of each church in accordance with the requirements of the respective churches. Each church should respect the preparation and notification requirements of the other churches.
   a. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg currently requires notification of the parish priest or deacon at least four months prior to the wedding.
   b. The Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania currently requires notification at least one month prior.
   c. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America leaves this concern to the discretion of the pastor or parish.
6. If for any reason one pastor refuses to solemnize the marriage and another pastor, when approached, agrees to do so, the two should discuss the situation to arrive at a mutual understanding. Each should respect the decision of the other, no matter how the situation turns out. Each in turn has the obligation to explain to the couple the reason for this course of action and the implications for the marriage.

B. Freedom to Marry

1. The pastors of both churches have the responsibility of determining that the two parties are free to marry both ecclesiastically and/or civilly and have the intention of entering a Christian marriage.
   a) The Episcopal pastor will be responsible for seeing that the Declaration of Intention is properly signed.
   b) The Roman Catholic pastor will be responsible for seeing that all the necessary forms required by Canon Law are filled out and that the necessary permissions and/or dispensations for entering into an ecumenical marriage are obtained from the Chancery.
   c) The Lutheran pastor's responsibilities are not defined in specific church regulations. However, the pastor does have the responsibility of determining the couple's suitability and intent to enter Christian marriage.
2. Differences exists in the doctrine and discipline of the churches regarding the indissolubility of the marriage bond. Therefore, at times the churches will respond differently to remarriage after civil divorce.
   a) If one or both parties have been divorced, the Roman Catholic and Episcopal pastors must present the situation

to their respective Diocesan office for resolution. Both pastors should advise the couple that no date may be set nor arrangements made for the marriage until both churches have decided freedom to marry.

1) The Episcopal pastor will be responsible for gathering the necssary documentation and sending it to the bishop for a decision.
2) The Roman Catholic pastor will assist the couple in presenting the case to the Tribunal and in gathering all necessary information so that a decision might be reached.

b) The Lutheran pastor must make a decision with regard to remarriage after counseling the divorced person and the intended spouse.

c) One church might declare a person canonically free to marry while another might not. In such cases each pastor will have the responsibility of instructing the couple in the consequences of entering into a marriage which one or both churches does not consider valid. If, after counseling, the couple decides to marry, they should be informed that their action might deprive them of the Sacraments of a particular church should the marriage not conform to the canonical requirements of that church. Nevertheless, they should know that a genuine concern for their temporal and spiritual welfare remains in both churches.

d) In cases where one pastor decides to solemnize a marriage in which the other pastor cannot or will not have a part, each pastor should respect the good conscience of the other and try to understand the other's position.

## C. Pre-marital Counseling

1. In a preceding section (A, 4) it was recommended that joint counseling be held. Each pastor should counsel couples in his/her church's teaching and practice.
2. Counseling should include at least such issues as the nature of Christian marriage, communication skills, conflict management, human sexuality, finances, family background, and personality differences. For the Roman Catholic Church this counseling would normally include participation in the Pre-Cana process.
3. Certain specific issues should receive special attention in the counseling, especially the following:

a) Mutual respect: Each party in the marriage should be led to a better understanding of and appreciation for the religious traditions and beliefs of his or her partner. This should also include a deepening of commitment by each partner to his or her own church tradition.

b) By virtue of Baptism and Matrimony an ecumenical marriage becomes a domestic church whose life is strengthened by common prayer in the home. The couple should therefore develop shared patterns of prayer with which they are both comfortable. As the family is the nurturing place of prayer, it is a good thing for a family to worship together. For the ecumenical family this presents special decisions. Each couple should be encouraged to remember always the spiritual unity of their marriage. This calls them to develop a pattern of worship that both encourages partners to worship in their respective churches and also to strengthen their marriage bond by occasionally worshiping together.

c) Responsible parenthood: This is a sensitive area and one in which the parties might have different points of view. It should be thought through very carefully and discussed frankly. It is the responsibility of the pastor, in a discussion of family planning, to raise all aspects of parental responsibility — spiritual, economic, social, moral — and to enunciate clearly the teachings of his or her church in the matter.

d) Religious education of children: As the primary educators of their children, all Christian parents have the responsibility of religious education within their families.

As well as requiring that the Roman Catholic party reaffirm his or her faith, the Roman Catholic Church also requires that he or she promises "to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as [Roman] Catholics." (Canon 1125) Here again the parties themselves will have to work out how they will handle this issue.

In any resolution, care must be taken so that the children grow in a deep awareness of and appreciation for the gospel and the religious convictions of both parents. The children should also be made aware of the many areas of agreement between the churches, as well as the differences.

## THE PLANNING AND CELEBRATION OF THE MARRIAGE LITURGY

The marriage Liturgy is the culmination of the process of preparation and sharing between the couple and their pastors described above. Since it is the celebration of the marriage bond, it is also seen as a public witness to the mutual respect and understanding of the couple for each other and for their religious traditions as well as a witness to the mutual support offered to the couple in their marriage by both churches. It is most appropriate for both pastors to participate in the planning and the celebration of the Liturgy.

## A. The Liturgy

The marriage is normally celebrated according to the ritual and liturgy of the church in which the wedding takes place. The pastor of that church should preside and the other pastor should be given a place of honor and should take an appropriate role in the celebration. The respective roles of the pastors should clearly be defined prior to the time of the rehearsal.

Provided below is an outline of the Episcopal, Lutheran and Roman Catholic marriage liturgies outside the context of the Eucharistic Liturgy.

### 1. Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (1979)

| | |
|---|---|
| The Exhortation | either pastor |
| The Declaration | either pastor |
| The Collect | the Episcopal pastor |
| The Lessons | appropriate for either or for lay participation |
| The Homily* | either pastor |
| The Marriage | Episcopal pastor |
| The Prayer | either pastor |
| The Blessing | Episcopal pastor |

### 2. *Lutheran Book of Worship* Marriage Liturgy

| | |
|---|---|
| Apostolic Greeting | Lutheran pastor |
| Prayer of the Day | either pastor |
| The Lessons | appropriate for either or for lay participation |
| The Homily* | either pastor |
| Statement of Intent | either pastor |
| The Marriage | Lutheran pastor |
| Blessing | Lutheran pastor |
| Blessing by Parents and/or Wedding Party | Lay participation |
| Prayers | appropriate for either or for lay participation |
| Blessing | either or both pastors |

### 3. Roman Catholic "Rite of Marriage" (Latin Rite)

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|---|---|
| Greeting & Collect | Roman Catholic pastor |
| Hebrew and/or Christian Scripture Readings | appropriate for either or for lay participation |
| The Gospel and Homily* | either pastor |
| The Rite of Marriage | Roman Catholic pastor |
| Prayers and Petitions | either pastor or lay participation |
| Nuptual Blessing | Roman Catholic pastor |
| Final Blessing | either or both pastors |

*It is noted that while liturgical guidelines would permit either pastor to preach outside eucharistic celebrations, normally the host pastor would deliver the homily.

### B. The Eucharist

An ecumenical marriage may, at the request of both parties, be celebrated in the context of a Eucharistic Liturgy. However, since intercommunion is not yet a reality, the Episcopal or Lutheran would not be able to receive communion in the Roman Catholic Mass nor would the Roman Catholic be able to receive communion in the Episcopal or Lutheran Holy Communion. Both the Lutheran and Episcopal churches permit all baptized persons in good standing who acknowledge the Real Presence to receive communion. At this time the concelebration of the Eucharist by both pastors is not permitted in any of our churches. Lutherans and Episcopalians are participating in an interim sharing of the Eucharist according to published guidelines.

For these reasons the desirability of celebrating marriage within the context of an Eucharist Liturgy should be carefully discussed in the preparation process, and both parties should be made aware of current teachings and restrictions. Pastors involved in marriages between a Roman Catholic and an Episcopalian or Lutheran might suggest alternative possibilities to a Eucharistic Liturgy and encourage those who have a deep Eucharistic devotion to receive at the parish Eucharist earlier on the day of the wedding company with their families.

In any event great care should be taken by the pastors in ministering to the couple, and patience and charity exercised by all.

### C. Recording the Marriage

Episcopal pastors are required to record the marriage in the register of the Episcopal Church regardless of where it takes place. Roman Catholic pastors are required to record the marriage in the register of the Roman Catholic Church where the marriage takes place. In cases where the marriage is celebrated according to a rite other than the Roman Catholic, the marriage should be recorded in the register of the Roman Catholic pastor who applies for the dispensation from Canonical Form. Lutheran pastors are required to record in the register only marriage at which he/she presides.

The pastor who presides at the marriage and witnesses the vows is responsible for signing and returning the civil marriage certificate.

## CONTINUING SUPPORT

While this document deals specifically with the preparation of couples for marriage, these couples should be reassured as to the churches' continuing concern for their marriage. This should be done by offering and encouraging opportunities for marriage counseling and enrichment.

The undersigned commend this document for joint study and use by the clergy of their respective churches.

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